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Developing effective counseling facilities in schools

Abstract

As counseling becomes more and more important in school systems, the planning for and designing of effective physical facilities becomes more important. It is the intent of this paper to assist an individual interested in school counseling to explore the physical setting for the most conducive counseling and guidance delivery. Each individual school may want to amend the suggested plan based on school size and guidance philosophy.

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE COUNSELING FACILITIES
IN SCHOOLS

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

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Michael John Butler
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As counseling becomes more and more important in school systems, the planning for and designing of effective physical facilities becomes more important. It is the intent of this paper to assist an individual interested in school counseling to explore the physical setting for the most conducive counseling and guidance delivery. Each individual school may want to amend the suggested plan based on school size and guidance philosophy.

Proper counseling facilities are necessary to enhance counseling effectiveness. Without question, counselor effectiveness is influenced by the physical environment in which it functions (Gibson, Mitchell, & Higgins, 1983). Counselors may work successfully in the absence of suitable facilities, but the quality of their work is negatively affected by inadequate physical facilities and equipment (Roeber, Smith, & Erickson, 1955). The climate the counselor works in with the client can be very conducive to meaningful and effective counseling (B. J. Beach, personal communication, August 9, 1987). As counseling gains popularity in schools, it will be necessary for the effective program to have facilities specifically designed for it. School building planners are taking a stance of planning for adequate and appropriate guidance and counseling space before the site is built, rather than an add-on as the need arises (Colorado guidance and counseling handbook for school counselors, 1978; Elementary guidance, 1970a; Elementary guidance in Iowa, a guide, 1968; Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1971;

Iowa K-12 career guidance curriculum guide for student development, 1986; T. Jones, personal communication, July 21, 1987; Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980; Guidelines for comprehensive guidance and counseling services, 1980; Elementary school guidance and counseling, 1979; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980).

Good planning in advance of construction is important to ensure appropriate facilities. To enhance good planning it is wise to include the architect, school board, school administrators, guidance personnel, faculty members, students, and patrons (Weaver, cited in Zeran & Riccio, 1962). This will allow the architect to proceed and include the necessary elements desired. As such, each school is unique and should develop a plan to satisfy its own particular needs (Colorado guidance and counseling handbook for school counselors, 1978; Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1971). In particular, the purposes, function, size of school, extent of the guidance program, what supplemental services are included, and the philosophy of guidance must be considered (Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1971; Twiford, 1960; Weaver, cited in Zeran & Riccio, 1962; Zeran, 1972). Inclusion of these ideas when planning a facility will greatly improve the usability and effectiveness of the guidance program within a school.

Unique requirements of the guidance and counseling program should be considered when the design plan is developed. These considerations include privacy and confidentiality. The importance of soundproofing the office and counseling rooms to prevent the counselor and client from being overheard can not be stressed enough (Colorado guidance and counseling handbook for school counselors, 1978; Kansas guidance program evaluation guide, 1982; Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980). Visual privacy by the use of curtains, doors, and walls to the ceiling should also be provided (Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1963). The visual privacy can be further improved by the use of a private exit from the counseling area (Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980).

Accessibility to the guidance area includes many factors. The strongest criteria for location and accessibility is the location in reference to the administrative offices. There is overwhelming support that the guidance offices should be located near but separate from the administrative offices (Hanson & Stevic, 1969; Hollis & Hollis, 1965; Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1963; Iowa K-12 career guidance curriculum guide for student development, 1986; Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980; Nelson, 1968; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South

Carolina secondary schools, 1980). The guidance area should be near the administrative offices for access to student records and clerical records. It should be near the main flow of student traffic to facilitate contact and near the main entrance to increase accessibility for parents and persons from community agencies (Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980; Twiford, 1960). Another thought is to locate the facilities where they are better accessible to teachers so the teachers may better use the guidance area (Hollis & Hollis, 1965). The location should reflect the guidance philosophy that the counselor is there to primarily serve pupils, and that he or she is not an administrator but works closely with the school administrator(s) in several areas (Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1963).

In an educational counseling program there are certain types of rooms or areas needed to carry out guidance and counseling activities. These activities suggest different types and sizes of rooms. These rooms should be located in the same area and will make up the guidance center (Elementary guidance, 1970a; Hollis & Hollis, 1965; Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1963; Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1971; Nelson, 1967).

The guidance center should include, first of all, a reception or waiting area to facilitate the coordination of guidance

services (Hollis & Hollis, 1965; Twiford, 1960). This area should be designed for reception, waiting, and space for an informational resource area. This room should be sufficiently large enough to provide space for a secretary-receptionist and for one student for each counselor. In addition, there should be space available for three or four additional persons, such as parents, teachers, or support persons. It is also advisable to have other exits for students to leave through to provide for privacy (Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980). Approximate space requirements for this area would be 250 square feet for a one-counselor office and 300 square feet for a two-counselor center (Gibson, Mitchell, & Higgins, 1983).

For individual counseling, parent conferences, and counselor preparation, each counselor should have a private office. This room should have auditory and visual privacy assured. The counselor should have a space large enough for accommodating at least four people: the counselor, the pupil, and the pupil's parents (Hollis & Hollis, 1965). The approximate size of this office would be 100 to 120 square feet.

A recent trend suggests that, with the increase of small-group counseling, each counselor office should be large enough to accommodate six to eight students at one time. This would necessitate a larger area for each counselor. A more traditional philosophy suggests small group counseling and staffing

conferences can be satisfied by providing one conference room (Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980). This small conference room, accommodating up to 12 people, is for use for conferences and small group guidance. It can also be used by the school psychologist, health personnel, college admissions officers, personnel directors from various occupations, Armed Forces recruiting officers, and other visitors involved in guidance and counseling functions (Bursch & Reid, 1957; Iowa K-12 career guidance curriculum guide for student development, 1986; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980). The approximate size of this room should be 200 to 300 square feet (Hollis & Hollis, 1965).

Another room that can be used in a variety of ways, such as the conference room, is the multipurpose room. This room will have many uses. These will vary from school to school, depending upon the guidance services offered and the concept of group procedures in guidance. This room should be about the same size as a regular classroom. The multipurpose room can be used for group guidance, inservice training, group testing, and staff sessions (Hill, 1965; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980; Twiford, 1960).

A small, lockable room is necessary for storage. A storage space is the practical solution to handle materials, equipment, records, and supplies that need to be stored. This room must be

accessible to the secretarial area and to the counseling and testing areas (Gibson, Mitchell, & Higgins, 1983; Hollis & Hollis, 1965; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980). The size of this room should be 20 square feet per 100 students served.

Restroom facilities are desirable in or near the guidance center. The close location will provide a place for students to regain composure before leaving the guidance center, if necessary (Gibson, Mitchell, & Higgins, 1983).

There should be another exit leaving the guidance center other than the entrance through the reception area. This will ensure more privacy and confidentiality. Also, some students may have been through an emotional interview and do not want to face people (B. J. Beach, personal communication, 1987; Hill, 1965; Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980).

It is necessary to provide for comfortable environmental factors when designing a guidance center (B. J. Beach, personal communication, 1987; T. Jones, personal communication, 1987; W. Snyder, personal communication, August 10, 1987; Weaver, cited in Zeran & Riccio, 1962). The temperature of the areas should be comfortable. The climate will dictate the extent needed for proper heating and air conditioning. Some rooms are small and without windows, which will require a ventilation system.

Lighting may vary between areas within the guidance center. The conference room, multipurpose room, reception area, restroom,

and storage rooms will use overhead lighting as a rule, with plenty of light for reading, test taking, writing, and conferring. It may be necessary for the conference and multipurpose rooms to have the capability of darkness for the purpose of films, filmstrips, and video presentations. The counselor's office may have overhead lighting and also indirect or softer light for counseling.

The acoustics of the counseling facilities warrant special consideration. There should be sufficient acoustical materials in walls and doors to make each room's activities inaudible in the adjoining rooms.

Floors and wall coverings are important to the design of the facility. Where practical, carpet should be used to make the guidance center appear comfortable and inviting. The colors of the walls and floors should be calming colors and not distract the attention of the student. The entire atmosphere should be such that the focus remains on the student or students.

Each room of the guidance center will require different furnishings. Because of the variety of activities, it will be necessary to furnish each room accordingly.

Equipment is a very important part of a counseling program at this time. There are many new counseling books, films, filmstrips, computer programs, and play media that can be used in the counseling program. Each room in the guidance center will

have its own special equipment that can be used as a counseling aid.

It is necessary for the reception room to be inviting to the students, since it is the first impression they will have of the guidance center. There should be a suitable desk and comfortable chair for a secretary. Chairs which are comfortable should be provided for those waiting. Some other items for consideration in this room are plants, pictures, possibly an aquarium, three dimensional artwork, and lamps on small tables. The furnishings of this room can possibly soothe a distraught student who may have to wait to see the counselor (B. J. Beach, personal communication, 1987; Pupil personnel services in the middle school, 1970b; Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1963; Elementary guidance in Iowa, a guide, 1968; Nelson, 1967; Roeber, Smith, & Erickson, 1955).

The reception and waiting area can include many types of equipment, depending on its size and function. Here is a place for a bookshelf that can include bibliotherapy counseling books and informational materials. The informational materials may cover careers, college catalogs, and pamphlets. There should be a bulletin board for announcements and posters with a calendar for marking important dates. There can be a computer for student use, table for study and filling out forms, secretary's equipment, and a phone (Hollis & Hollis, 1965; Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980; Roeber, Smith, & Erickson, 1955;

Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980).

The counseling office should include a desk and comfortable chair for the counselor and three comfortable chairs for the student and parent(s) or teacher. In this office there can also be pictures, plants, and three dimensional artwork that may give the office a sense of warmth (B. J. Beach, personal communication, 1987; Pupil personnel services in the middle school, 1970b; Guidance services suggested policies for Iowa schools, 1963).

In the counseling office there should be found a bookshelf with professional books, lockable file cabinet, private phone, reference books, tape recorder, and guidance records for each student. Some optional equipment may include video taping equipment that can be used in all areas of the guidance center, a computer, and one-way glass window viewing a multipurpose room (Hollis & Hollis, 1965; Elementary guidance in Iowa, a guide, 1968; Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980).

The conference room needs to have comfortable chairs for about 12 people and a table. This room does not need the pictures and plants, but they can be included (Elementary guidance, 1970; Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980).

A versatile room can be the small conference room. If it doubles as a testing room, there may be a need for study carrels. It also may include a chalkboard, overhead projector, and a computer from the reception area (Hollis & Hollis, 1965; Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980). Equipment that may be beneficial to the program can include video taping equipment, television, one-way glass windows, play area, play media, sand box, clay facilities, art supplies, puppets, and a sink. Individual counselors may choose many types of equipment to add to this room that will enhance their program (Hollis & Hollis, 1965; Guidance and counseling in the secondary school, 1980; Nelson, 1968; Administrator's guide for guidance by objectives program in South Carolina secondary schools, 1980; Twiford, 1960).

The multipurpose room can be the most diversely equipped room in the guidance center. This is especially true if this is associated with elementary guidance. Some basic equipment that should be present are book and storage shelves, chalkboard, bulletin board, blackout curtains, projector screen, overhead projector, and tables.

In the storage room, there should be shelves for storage of testing material, supplies, and audio-visual equipment. Some storage rooms may include the records for the students. In all cases, this door and the file cabinets should be lockable (Gibson,

Mitchell, & Higgins, 1983; Kansas guidance program evaluation guide, 1982).

Designing a physical facility for a guidance center should be a well thought out process. The preceding paragraphs have shown a need for, the process, the considerations, the room structure, the furnishings, and the equipment necessary for the design of an effective physical facility for guidance and counseling. It is important not only to provide good, sound counseling but also a good climate to undertake this difficult task. These guidelines can be used for a strong initial beginning to the planning and designing of a guidance facility.

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